

Hunting should trigger a more manageable deer herd

Buck to doe ratio shows imbalance

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The deer population and its management are important to many people within the Redstone community. To hunters, the deer herd provides opportunities to hunt throughout the hunting season. To others, the deer population provides an opportunity to see and enjoy nature. So whether you hunt or not, deer and their management may be important to you.

The natural resources division of the Directorate of Environment and Safety is responsible for managing surveys and providing population data to determine deer population management requirements. The current estimate for the total population of deer on Redstone Arsenal is approximately 3,900 animals. This estimate is based on spot light surveys conducted from 1998 to 2000 with followup spot surveys in 2001-02, with the population remaining fairly constant over this time. The habitat at Redstone is very good with sufficient browse and mast producing trees to support the existing or an even larger population. However, Redstone does not try to increase the population above this point because the potential for deer strikes by vehicles would be increased.



Courtesy photo

WILDLIFE— Though there are plenty of deer around, the population on post is imbalanced with many more does than bucks, according to the resource management division.

The initial surveys conducted in 1998 indicated a buck to doe ratio of 1:13. The last survey indicated a buck to doe ratio of 1:15. This shows that the sex ratio of the deer population is drastically out of balance in favor of does. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries recommends a population sex ratio goal of 1 buck to 1 doe. Because survey results show Redstone's deer population is so far out of balance, the Arsenal has set a management sex ratio goal of 1 buck to 3 does.

The installation biologist uses the hunting season as a management tool for managing the deer population. For the last five years, the natural resources division has been trying to increase the ratio of bucks to does by setting hunting season quotas of only 50 bucks and up to 400 does.

The hunting season is open and will close on Jan. 31. During the 2002-03 season, to date, 55 bucks and 157 does were harvested. These numbers are similar to the number of bucks and does that have been killed in the preceding several seasons. While more does than bucks are being harvested on Redstone, the current sex ratio estimate demonstrates that not enough are being harvested to significantly affect the population sex ratio.

Under optimum conditions, the resource management division expects to see 80 percent of all does 2.5 years old and older lactating. However, data from this season shows only 49 percent of the does 2.5 and older produced fawns this year, rather than 80 percent expected. Further, it was expected that at least 25 percent of the 1.5 year old does would produce fawns. Data from this season shows only about 1 percent of does 1.5 produced a fawn. Data also

indicates a seven-year decline in the percent of 1.5 does producing fawns. This reduction in reproduction is the result of the population sex ratio being drastically out of balance.

Unfortunately, a disproportionately large percentage of the young bucks are being harvested, resulting in fewer older and potentially trophy class bucks overall. Typically, does and immature bucks always dominate a population with this type of harvest on the buck population. This type of imbalance results in very few older deer being taken.

Though there are plenty of deer around, the population is not in balance. The resource management division is committed to managing the herd to restore an acceptable sex ratio and reestablishing a balanced deer population. The resource management division is working through the new Redstone Arsenal Hunting and Fishing Board to make hunting a better tool to help manage the deer herd on the installation. The benefit of a managed herd will be a more balanced ecosystem; and once the sex ratio is balanced, hunters may also have the opportunity to harvest more and larger bucks.